

What is claimed is:

1. A system for awarding prizes, the system comprising:
 - 5 (A) at least one gaming device, the gaming device being adapted to allow a player to play a game and produce a predetermined prize qualifying event;
 - (B) a plurality of prizes; and
 - (C) at least one vault, the vault comprising:
 - (a) a housing;
 - 10 (b) at least one compartment within the housing, wherein a plurality of prizes are located in the compartment, at least one of the prizes being removable directly from the compartment;
 - (c) an outer door attached to the housing, the door limiting access to the compartment when in a closed position;
 - 15 (d) an outer door lock positioned on the outer door and configured to selectively secure the outer door in a closed position; and
 - (e) an inner locking mechanism in close relative proximity to the compartment, the inner locking mechanism adapted to limit removal of a prize from the compartment; wherein the player may view the prizes the
20 player may receive when a prize qualifying event occurs.

2. The system of claim 1 further comprising;

(a) a plurality of inventory tags, each tag attached to a prize, each tag comprising a unique identifier;

5 (b) at least one inventory sensor located within the housing and in relatively close proximity to the compartment, the inventory sensor being adapted to transmit a signal to a computer, the signal indicating the presence or absence of the prize;

10 (c) a computer in communication with the inventory sensor and adapted to receive signals from the inventory sensor, wherein the computer is adapted to record information related to the prize.

3. The system of claim 1 further comprising a video screen located in the housing, the video screen adapted to display information relating to the prize.

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4. The system of claim 1 further comprising a container positioned within the compartment and directly removable from the compartment, wherein the prizes are removeably positioned inside the container.

20 5. The system of claim 1 wherein the prize qualifying event comprises a substantially randomly occurring predetermined prize qualifying event.

6. The system of claim 5 wherein the gaming device is a slot machine.

7. A system for awarding prizes, the system comprising:

(A) at least one gaming device, the gaming device being adapted to allow a player to play a game and to produce a predetermined prize qualifying event;

(B) a plurality of prizes; and

5 (C) at least one vault, the vault comprising:

(a) a housing;

(b) a plurality of compartments in the housing, each compartment being adapted to hold at least one of the plurality of prizes, the plurality of prizes being directly removable from the compartments, each compartment
10 having a window enabling the contents of the compartment to be seen from outside the vault;

(c) a plurality of external doors attached to the housing, the doors limiting access to the plurality of compartments when in a closed position;

(d) a plurality of external door locks, each lock coupled to one of the external
15 doors, the external door locks selectively securing the outer doors in a closed position; and

(e) a plurality of internal locks located within the housing and each internal lock in close relative proximity to a compartment, the internal locks being adapted to limit removal of the prizes from the compartments; wherein the
20 player may view the prize the player may receive when the prize qualifying event occurs.

8. The system of claim 7 further comprising;

(a) a plurality of inventory tags, each tag attached to a prize, each tag comprising a unique identifier;

(b) at least one inventory sensor located within the housing and in relatively close proximity to one of the compartments, the inventory sensor being adapted to transmit a signal to a computer, the signal indicating the presence or absence of a prize;

(c) a computer in communication with the inventory sensor and adapted to receive signals from the inventory sensor, wherein the computer is adapted to record information related to a prize.

9. The system of claim 7 further comprising a video screen within the housing, the video screen adapted to display information relating to a prize.

10. The system of claim 7 further comprising a container positioned within a compartment and directly removable from the compartment, wherein at least one prize is removeably positioned inside the container.

11. The system of claim 7 wherein the prize qualifying event comprises a substantially randomly occurring predetermined prize qualifying event.

12. The system of claim 11 wherein the gaming device is a slot machine.

13. A system for awarding prizes, the system comprising:

(A) at least one gaming device, the gaming device being adapted to allow a player to play a game and produce a predetermined prize qualifying event;

(B) a plurality of prizes; and

5 (C) at least one vault, the vault comprising:

(a) a housing;

(b) a plurality of compartments located in the housing, each compartment being adapted to hold at least one of the plurality of prizes, the plurality of prizes being positioned in the compartments and being directly removable from the compartments, each compartment having a window enabling contents of the compartment to be seen from outside the vault;

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(c) a plurality of external doors attached to the housing, each external door limiting access to one of the plurality of compartments when in a closed position;

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(d) a plurality of external door locks coupled to the external doors and configured to selectively secure the external doors in a closed position; and

(e) a plurality of prize locks located within the housing, the prize locks being adapted to limit removal of the prizes from the compartments; wherein the player may view the prizes the player may receive when the prize qualifying event occurs.

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14. The system of claim 13 further comprising;

- (a) a plurality of inventory tags, each tag attached to a prize, each tag comprising a unique identifier;
- (b) at least one inventory sensor located within the housing and in relatively close proximity to one of the compartments, the inventory sensor being adapted to transmit a signal to a computer, the signal indicating the presence or absence of a prize;
- (c) a computer in communication with the inventory sensor and adapted to receive signals from the inventory sensor, wherein the computer is adapted to record information related to the prize.

15. The system of claim 13 further comprising a container removably positioned within the compartment, wherein at least one prize is removeably positioned inside the container.

16. The system of claim 13 further comprising a video screen, the video screen adapted to display information relating to the prize.

17. The system of claim 13 wherein the prize qualifying event comprises a substantially randomly occurring predetermined prize qualifying event.

18. The system of claim 17 wherein the gaming device is a slot machine.

19. A system for awarding prizes, the system comprising:

(A) at least one gaming device, the gaming device being adapted to allow a player to play a game and produce a predetermined prize qualifying event;

5 (B) at least one prize; and

(C) at least one vault, the vault comprising:

(a) a housing;

(b) a compartment located within the housing, the compartment being adapted to hold the prize, the prize being positioned in the compartment and

10 directly removable from the compartment; and

(c) an automatic dispenser located in the housing in close relative proximity to the compartment; the automatic dispenser configured to move the prize into position for retrieval by the game player when a prize winning event occurs.

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20. The system of claim 19 further comprising;

(a) at least one inventory tag, the inventory tag attached to the prize, the tag comprising a unique identifier;

5 (b) at least one inventory sensor located within the housing and in relatively close proximity to the compartment, the inventory sensor being adapted to transmit a signal to a computer, the signal indicating the presence or absence of a prize;

10 (c) a computer in communication with the inventory sensor and adapted to receive signals from the inventory sensor, wherein the computer is adapted to record information related to the prize.

21. The system of claim 19 further comprising a container positioned within the compartment and directly removable from the compartment, wherein the prize is removeably
15 positioned inside the container.

22. The system of claim 19 further comprising a video screen, the video screen adapted to display information relating to the prize.

20 23. The system of claim 19 wherein the vault further comprises a replenishing system, wherein the replenishing system is configured to provide another prize to the compartment in the event that a prize is dispensed from the compartment.

24. The system of claim 19 wherein the automatic dispenser comprises:

- (a) a door attached to the housing and configured to limit access to the compartment when in a closed position;
- (b) a locking mechanism located in the compartment and configured to selectively secure the door in a closed position and configured to release when directed by a controller;
- (c) a controller, the controller in communication with the locking mechanism and adapted to send a signal to the locking mechanism, the signal directing the locking mechanism to release the door, allowing access to the prize.

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25. The system of claim 19 wherein the automatic dispenser comprises:

- (a) a door attached to the housing and configured to limit access to the compartment when in a closed position;
- (b) a locking mechanism located in the compartment and configured to selectively secure the compartment door in a closed position and configured to be releasable when signaled by a controller;
- (c) a controller, the controller in communication with the locking mechanism and configured to send a signal to the locking mechanism making the locking mechanism releasable; and
- (d) an input device mounted on the housing and in communication with the controller or the locking mechanism and indicating a player's selection of a prize, wherein the input device is adapted to be activated by the player, activation of the input device directing the locking mechanism to release.

26. The system of claim 25 further comprising a plurality of compartments, a plurality of doors, and a plurality of locking mechanisms, and wherein the activation of an input device directs the controller to release the selected locking mechanism and to secure any other locking mechanisms.

27. The system of claim 25 wherein the locking mechanism comprises a pin on the compartment door that engages a lock in the housing, wherein the lock is configured to release the pin when directed by the controller.

28. The system of claim 25 wherein the door is attached to the housing by a hinge, and wherein the hinge is spring loaded, the spring loaded hinge configured to spring open when the locking mechanism is disengaged.

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29. The system of claim 19, further comprising;

(a) a prize container positioned within the compartment and directly removable from the compartment, wherein the prize container contains a prize;

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(b) a compartment locking mechanism associated with the compartment, the compartment locking mechanism adapted to selectively limit removal of the container from the compartment; and

(c) a controller, the controller in communication with the compartment locking mechanism and configured to send a signal to the compartment

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locking mechanism causing the locking mechanism to disengage and allow the prize container to be removed.

30. The system of claim 29 wherein the compartment locking mechanism comprises:

- (a) a pin located in the housing and positionable between a first position and at least a second position, wherein in the first position the pin extends into the compartment and does not substantially extend into the compartment when in the second position;
- (b) a solenoid located in the housing and in communication with the pin, the solenoid adapted to actuate the pin between the first and second positions;
- (c) a spring located in the housing and in communication with the pin, the spring adapted to bias the pin; wherein the pin limits removal of the container when the pin is in the first position.

31. The system of claim 19 wherein the prize qualifying event comprises a substantially randomly occurring predetermined prize qualifying event.

32. The system of claim 31 wherein the gaming device is a slot machine.

33. A system for awarding prizes, the system comprising:

(A) at least one gaming device, the gaming device being adapted to allow a player to play a game and produce a predetermined prize qualifying event;

5 (B) a plurality of prizes; and

(C) at least one vault, the vault comprising:

(a) a housing;

(b) a rotating tray located within the housing and rotating about a substantially vertical axis of rotation, the rotating tray comprising at least one prize

10 located on the tray and directly removable from the tray;

(c) a door coupled to the housing and limiting access to the rotating tray when in a closed position;

(d) a door locking mechanism coupled to the door and configured to selectively secure the door in a closed position, the door locking

15 mechanism being adapted to limit removal of the prize from the tray;

wherein the player may view the prize the player may receive when the prize qualifying event occurs; and

(e) a prize lock associated with the rotating tray, the prize lock being adapted to limit removal of the prize from the rotating tray.

34. The system of claim 33, wherein the rotating tray further comprises a plurality of partitions, the plurality of partitions defining a plurality of compartments, wherein at least one of the plurality of prizes may be located within each of the plurality of compartments and the prizes are directly removable from the compartments.

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35. The system of claim 33 further comprising;

(a) a plurality of inventory tags, each tag attached to a prize, each tag comprising a unique identifier;

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(b) at least one inventory sensor located within the housing and in relatively close proximity to one of the prizes, the inventory sensor being adapted to transmit a signal to a computer, the signal indicating the presence or absence of a prize;

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(c) a computer in communication with the inventory sensor and adapted to receive signals from the inventory sensor, wherein the computer is adapted to record information related to the prize.

36. The system of claim 33 further comprising a container positioned on the rotating tray and directly removable from the rotating tray, wherein a prize is removeably positioned inside the container.

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37. The system of claim 33 further comprising a video screen, the video screen adapted to display information relating to the prize.

38. The system of claim 33 wherein the prize qualifying event comprises a substantially randomly occurring predetermined prize qualifying event.

5 39. The system of claim 38 wherein the gaming device is a slot machine.

40. A system for awarding prizes, the system comprising:

(A) at least one gaming device, the gaming device being adapted to allow a player to play a game and produce a predetermined prize qualifying event;

5 (B) a plurality of prizes; and

(C) at least one vault, the vault not being in direct physical contact with the gaming device, the vault in communication with the gaming device, the vault comprising:

(a) a housing;

10 (b) a plurality of compartments in the housing, each compartment being adapted to hold at least one of the plurality of prizes, the plurality of prizes being directly removable from the compartments; and

(c) a prize lock, the prize lock being adapted to limit removal of a prize from one of the compartments; wherein the player may view the prize the player may receive when the prize qualifying event occurs.

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41. The system of claim 40 further comprising;

(a) a plurality of inventory tags, each tag attached to a prize, each tag comprising a unique identifier;

5 (b) at least one inventory sensor located within the housing and in relatively close proximity to one of the compartments, the inventory sensor being adapted to transmit a signal to a computer, the signal indicating the presence or absence of a prize;

10 (c) a computer in communication with the inventory sensor and adapted to receive signals from the inventory sensor, wherein the computer is adapted to record information related to the prize.

42. The system of claim 40 further comprising a container positioned within a compartment and directly removable from the compartment, wherein a prize is removeably positioned
15 inside the container.

43. The system of claim 40 further comprising a video screen, the video screen adapted to display information relating to the prizes.

20 44. The system of claim 40 further comprising a plurality of compartment doors attached to the housing, each compartment door configured to limit access to one of the plurality of compartments when in a closed position.

45. The system of claim 44 further comprising a plurality of compartment locking mechanisms coupled to the plurality of compartment doors, each compartment locking mechanism configured to selectively secure one of the compartment doors in a closed position.

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46. The system of claim 40 wherein the prize qualifying event comprises a substantially randomly occurring predetermined prize qualifying event.

47. The system of claim 46 wherein the gaming device is a slot machine.

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48. A system for awarding prizes, the system comprising:

(A) at least one gaming device, the gaming device being adapted to allow a player to play a game and produce a predetermined prize qualifying event;

5 (B) a plurality of prizes; and

(C) at least one vault, the vault comprising:

(a) a housing;

(b) a plurality of compartments within the housing, each compartment being adapted to hold at least one of the plurality of prizes, the plurality of prizes being positioned in the compartments and directly removable from the compartments;

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(c) a prize lock associated with at least one of the compartments, the prize lock being adapted to limit removal of the prize from at least one of the compartments; wherein the player may view the prize the player may receive when the prize qualifying event occurs;

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(d) an award indicia reader located on the housing, the award indicia reader designed to accept an award indicia; and

(e) a processor in communication with the award indicia reader, the processor configured to determine if a player is entitled to an award, the processor in communication with the lock, the processor configured to disable the prize lock if the player is entitled to an award.

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49. The system of claim 48 further comprising;

(a) a plurality of inventory tags, each tag attached to a prize, each tag comprising a unique identifier;

(b) at least one inventory sensor located within the housing and in relatively close proximity to one of the compartments, the inventory sensor being adapted to transmit a signal to a computer, the signal indicating the presence or absence of a prize;

(c) a computer in communication with the inventory sensor and adapted to receive signals from the inventory sensor, wherein the computer is adapted to record information related to the prize.

50. The system of claim 48 further comprising a container positioned within a compartment and directly removable from the compartment, wherein a prize is removeably positioned inside the container.

51. The system of claim 48 further comprising a video screen, the video screen adapted to display information relating to the prizes.

52. The system of claim 48 wherein the prize qualifying event comprises a substantially randomly occurring predetermined prize qualifying event.

53. The system of claim 52 wherein the gaming device is a slot machine.